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ABSTRACT

One of the major objectives of all schools is to help each student become an independent reader. By necessity then, the teacher, the materials utilized in the teaching process, and the classroom organization used must help students learn and gain proficiency in applying basic reading skills to the reading of all types of materials. To achieve the goal of developing basic reading skills, the teacher should consider at least six major areas: assessment of reading skills, materials utilized, classroom organization, sequential development of word recognition skills, development of comprehension skills, and application of study skills. The major comprehension skills which teachers should develop involve locating information, recalling information, organizing information, interpreting and extending information, reviewing, and applying learning. (WR)

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DEVELOPING BASIC READING SKILLS THROUGH EFFECTIVE CLASS ORGANIZATION

To be presented

May 4, 1974

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One of the major objectives of all schools is to help each student become an independent reader. By necessity then, the teacher, the materials utilized in the teaching process, and the classroom organization used must help students learn and gain proficiency in applying basic reading skills to the reading of all types of materials.

Comprehension is what reading is all about. The reader, however, will experience difficulty in comprehending a selection unless he can pronounce the words and knows their meanings as they are used in context.

The teacher therefore, is confronted with developing not only word attack skills but also comprehension skills. At the same time, she must help each pupil learn to apply the skills independently to his reading. To be successful in attaining this goal, the teacher must have an organized plan of attack. Skill development cannot be left to chance or incidental teaching. Neither can a hit-and-miss method be employed to accomplish such an important job.

To achieve the goal of developing basic reading skills, the teacher should consider at least six major areas:

1. Assessment of reading skills
2. Materials utilized
3. Classroom organization
4. Sequential development of word recognition skills

5. Development of comprehension skills

6. Application of study skills

Assessment of Reading Skills

The first day of school each teacher will greet children with varying degrees of ability, attitudes, social and emotional adjustment, language development, and interest in reading. In order to follow sound principles of teaching, the teacher must assess the specific reading skills pupils have mastered and those in which they are deficient.

Materials Utilized

After assessment of reading skills, the teacher must decide what materials she will utilize to meet the needs of her pupils.

Basal reading series can provide for the sequential development of all the reading skills, but those materials should not be considered as the sole reading program. Many other materials should be used to supplement the basal readers.

Classroom Organization

Pupil assessment will aid the teacher in determining her organizational plan. Classroom organization should not be thought of as a method of teaching. It is a plan through which good methods and techniques can be employed in developing basic reading skills. This plan must allow for flexibility at all times, and it must be practical, work-

able, and functional.

Dechant (1) pointed out that class organization is only one phase of a reading program and is not the total answer to developing reading skills. Regardless of the grouping used, pupils will vary in reading ability. Even in homogeneous grouping, there will be a wide range in skill development and performance among pupils.

Because of the many variables involved, it is next to impossible to teach all pupils in a given classroom the same skill at the same time from the same material. Since pupils must be taught on a level where they can experience success, subgrouping within the larger group is important.

Subgrouping those pupils who are near the same level in skill development will mitigate the instruction and as Jones (5) stated, will give pupils a sense of security and facilitate learning. The teacher can individualize her instruction within the subgroups, and when necessary, can pull those pupils from the subgroups who require more individual attention.

Duffy (2) stressed that if small-group instruction is to be successful, there can be few or no interruptions from the rest of the class. This means that the teacher must not only plan the skills

lessons, but she must also plan activities for those pupils who are not involved in the group she is teaching. This, of course, would hold true with any type of organization.

The teacher's success or failure to meet the needs of the majority of her pupils is dependent to a large extent on her ability to plan her work and to implement those plans.

Sequential Development of Word Recognition Skills

Word recognition skills may be classified as sight words, phonetic analysis, structural analysis, context clues, and dictionary usage.

Sight words

Developing sight vocabulary is not considered a technique for unlocking unknown words, but it is most important in beginning reading as pupils' sight vocabulary serves as a basis for teaching phonetic analysis.

The sight words are mostly nonphonetic and, according to Guszak (3), constitute nearly half of one's reading vocabulary. It is, therefore, important that pupils learn them early.

Most basal reading programs initiate reading instruction with sight words. This enables pupils to read for meaning from the beginning. Too, once pupils have mastered a store of sight words, they can be more

successful in reading easy library books.

Phonetic analysis

Phonetic instruction, although important, should not be considered as the only word recognition technique. The teaching of sound/symbol relations should be an integral part of the reading instruction and the skills should be developed sequentially. These relations are usually taught within the context of a word rather than in isolation. Many pupils encounter difficulty in connecting the letters to form words when phonics is taught in isolation. Such a practice can also be detrimental to comprehension.

Phonetic instruction usually begins with initial consonant letters because of the high consistency of the sounds they represent. After pupils have learned a few consonant sound/symbol relations, introduction of short vowel sounds is begun. Instruction of vowel letters usually begins with short vowel sounds because of their frequency in beginning reading material and also because they are phonetically more consistent than are long vowel sounds.

As quickly as pupils know some sight words and a few phonetic skills, they are called on to begin using these skills to unlock unfamiliar words. Obviously, teaching a skill for the sake of teaching it is of little value. The value lies in the pupil's ability to apply the new knowledge

to the pronunciation of unknown words.

Structural analysis

Pupils need to develop some skills in structural analysis rather early. Inflectional endings such as -ed, -ing, and plural s will enable students to read many words they would be unable to read otherwise.

Structural analysis deals with more than inflectional endings, however. Contractions; compound words; syllabication; and all affixes, that is, prefixes, suffixes, inflectional endings, and word elements are components of this skill.

Pflaum (7) indicated that the ability to comprehend depends largely on one's ability to understand the vocabulary used. When a pupil concerns himself with the pronunciation and meanings of the base and affix of a word, it will be more meaningful than if he just looks the word up in the dictionary.

In teaching this structural skill, the teacher must help pupils see that many two- and three-syllable words are composed of a base and an affix/es. With the teacher's help, pupils can approximate the meanings of the affixed word. If necessary, pupils may then go to the dictionary for verification. Such indepth study of words aids pupils with unknown words they will encounter in the future as well as the

immediate word at hand.

Context clues

Quite frequently a reader will use context clues as a method of getting the pronunciation and/or meaning of a word. In order to do this, he must skip over the unknown word and read the rest of the sentence or paragraph. In many instances, the reader will need to combine his phonetic and structural knowledge with that of using context clues. Assume that the reader does not know the word under in the sentence, "I sat under the tree." By using context clues, he could determine that the word is under or beside. Then he must apply phonetic skills to be sure that the word is under.

This important word attack skill does not come naturally for pupils. It must be taught.

Dictionary usage

This is perhaps one of the least developed areas of the word attack skills. Even though this skill does not help pupils recognize words instantly, it is essential that pupils know how to use the glossary and dictionary as means of helping themselves with the pronunciation and meanings of unknown words.

Development of Comprehension Skills

Fluency in word calling does not automatically insure competency

in comprehension. The ability to comprehend means more than the mere ability to understand the literal meaning of the author's words. Comprehension in its complete sense demands also the ability to read critically and to read creatively.

The development of comprehension skills cannot be left to chance. The job must be approached gradually and sequentially, beginning first with the sentence, on to the paragraph, to the full page, and ultimately to chapters and the entire selection.

Prior to silent reading, key motivational questions must be planted by the teacher. If pupils are to grasp the full meaning of the author's words, this finding and gathering of information should then be followed by oral discussion for interpretation and extension.

The major comprehension skills which teachers should develop are:

1. Locating information
2. Recalling information
3. Organizing information
4. Interpreting and extending information
5. Reviewing
6. Applying learning

Locating information

Pupils should be taught to locate specific information within a

selection. These locational skills can be taught through teacher questions and statements such as: (1) Find the words that describe the clouds. (2) Who will find and read the sentence/s that help you know how Mother felt?

Locational skills should not be confined to a specific selection. The use of all book parts should be taught as means of locating information.

No one book can contain all the information a reader may need or desire about a particular topic. Pupils should, therefore, be taught to utilize reference aids such as encyclopedias, newspapers, and other library sources as means of gathering information.

Recalling information

Since retention of salient facts and ideas is necessary for the development of higher-level thinking, it is important that teachers attend to the literal level of comprehension. According to Guszak (4), teachers allot about two-thirds of their questions to the area of recalling information. He pointed out, however, that pupils forget facts rapidly and that memorized knowledge does not necessarily represent higher-level thinking.

Teachers must help pupils develop the skills of using facts as

a basis for thinking. If the teacher asks factual questions, she can expect only factual answers. No thinking--only remembering--is involved in such parroted exchanges.

Organizing information

The accumulation of facts from the printed page is only the beginning. The reader must be able to organize those facts and to translate them into his own words and into his own ideas. Such ability to organize and to orally rephrase ideas is basic to comprehension.

Other organizational skills are outlining and summarizing. These skills help a pupil read for main ideas and supporting details.

Interpreting and extending information

Being able to locate answers, to recall factual information, and to organize information in sequence is not enough. An effective reader must gain insight into the how and why as well as the who, what, and when of the selection read.

By asking probing questions, the teacher encourages pupils to characterize, empathize, and analyze; to make judgments, predictions, comparisons, and inferences; to draw conclusions; to see relationships; to distinguish between fact, fiction, and opinion; and to note exaggerations.

Although the reader must fall back on his own knowledge, experiences, and previous reading to exercise these critical and creative reading skills, most pupils cannot and will not do so without help and guidance from the teacher.

Reviewing

Reviewing what has been read helps the reader to fix important facts and ideas in his mind. The reader should ask himself questions such as: (1) What new experience or knowledge did I get? (2) How did the information support or contradict what I already know? (3) Why was it written? (4) Did the author accomplish his purpose?

Applying learning

This skill requires a pupil's going beyond the book, article, or story, and turning to himself. The reader must use his own background to determine the accuracy of what he reads. At the same time, he is building background by asking himself questions such as: (1) What does this material mean to me? (2) How can I use this information now and in the future? The reader must do something with the knowledge if he is to make it his own.

Application of Study Skills

Pupils learn to read for two reasons--to gain information and/or pleasure if reading silently and to share information and/or pleasure

if reading orally. Many pupils, however, develop word power and comprehension skills sufficient for reading story-type materials but are unable to transfer and utilize the appropriate skills to reading subject matter.

A complete and total reading program does not, therefore, end with the development of basic skills. Along with being developmental, the reading program must be functional. It must provide help in developing the ability to apply skills to the reading of subject matter materials.

Learning to read is not enough--pupils must develop ability to read to learn. Daisy Jones related a fourth grader's remarks about working with content reading skills. The boy exclaimed, "My goodness, we don't learn to read just to read reading, we learn to read to read something." The "something" the boy was referring to was mathematics, social studies, science, and other materials of an expository nature.

The reading of subject matter calls for skills necessary for reading fun selections. Reading in subject areas, however, requires more specific skills pertinent to each subject area. In reading mathematics, for example, the pupil must apply the skills of reading for main ideas and organizing those ideas. He must determine the question/s being asked. Then he must determine the process for solving the problem. In social studies, however, the skills of recalling and organizing facts and ideas

and of seeing relationships are more pertinent.

Teaching pupils to apply independently the essential comprehension skills to the reading of subject-matter material is a part of teaching reading and should, therefore, be included as a part of the teacher's plans for developing reading skills.

Conclusion

Overstreet (6) stated that for the most part, schools build mental adding machines. Fact is added to fact until the sum of the facts equals graduation. He went on to say that schools should build critical and creative minds, not accepting and reproducing minds.

Good reading and good comprehension are synonomous. Certainly the assimilation of facts is important, but good reading does not stop there. It also encompasses the ability to read fluently, to read creatively, and to read critically. Therefore, as the teacher strives to build good readers, she must, as Mr. Overstreet said, strive to develop critical, inquisitive, and creative minds.

To accomplish this task, the teacher must be armed with a total, and sequentially planned, reading program. She must know where she is going, how she is going to get there, and what she will do when she arrives. In other words, she must plan her skills lessons and then develop those skills in an effective classroom organization.

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